

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 015

JC 930 044

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TITLE Mandatory Remediation in Tennessee: Strategy for Promoting Excellence while Serving the Underprepared.  
INSTITUTION Nashville State Technical Inst., TN.  
PUB DATE [92]  
NOTE 18p.  
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Academic Aptitude; Budgets; Community Colleges; Educational Finance; Educational Legislation; \*Enrollment Trends; Financial Exigency; High Risk Students; Program Costs; Program Development; Program Effectiveness; \*Remedial Instruction; \*Remedial Programs; State Programs; \*Student Placement; \*Testing Programs; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students  
IDENTIFIERS \*Tennessee

## ABSTRACT

Following a 1984 study revealing the limited preparation of its entering college freshmen, the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) intervened dramatically on behalf of underprepared students, providing enhanced funding for remedial courses and requiring that students complete remediation before enrolling in any degree program. Based on their standardized pre-admission test scores, students are either admitted to a college unconditionally, or receive additional testing and, if necessary, remedial placement. The effects of the TBR's intervention have been dramatic. Since 1985, at least 50% of each entering class of full-time equivalent (FTE) freshmen under 21 years of age at the state's 12 community colleges, 2 technical institutes, and 6 universities, have been placed in one or more remedial courses. Of the 13,700 FTE new freshmen placed in remedial courses in fall 1991, 81% were enrolled at the state's two-year colleges, representing 85% of all first-time, degree-seeking two-year college students. Among 1991 new students over 21 years of age at two-year institutions, 95% were placed in remedial courses, up from 74% in 1986. The direct costs for remediation at all the state's institutions in 1991-92 totaled \$23.1 million, creating a budgetary strain. At one two-year institute, Nashville State Technical Institute (NSTI), total fall enrollments from 1984 through 1992 showed no overall growth, while growth in remedial course enrollments increased by 292%, creating significant structural and funding problems at the institute. While the TBR has made a major commitment to underprepared students, the realities of the state budget and enrollment patterns are creating difficulties for the program's continuance. (PAA)

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**MANDATORY REMEDIATION IN TENNESSEE:  
STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING EXCELLENCE  
WHILE SERVING THE UNDERPREPARED**

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### Abstract

The State of Tennessee, through its Board of Regents, intervened on the behalf of underprepared students and created a state-wide remediation program. Although both the two- and four-year institutions have mandatory remediation, placement rates for the two-year colleges are stunning. Eighty-five percent of Tennessee's community college's entering class of 1991 required remediation, up from 73 percent in 1986.

The State of Tennessee's proactive posture toward remediation is noteworthy because of the phenomenal growth of enrollment in remedial programs, the state's willingness to provide enhanced funding for remediation programs, and the requirement that remediation be completed before the student is allowed to enroll in any degree program. During the last five years, 92.5 thousand freshman FTE have been placed in remediation. The cost of the TBR program from Fall, 1986 to Fall, 1992 has been \$110 million dollars.

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Introduction

Institutions of higher education, especially community colleges, have dramatically increased upward educational mobility of America's adult population. The college class of 1992 was awarded over a million undergraduate degrees and approximately 400,000 graduate degrees. Today, one person in five is a college graduate, doubling the percent of college graduates in 1967 and far outdistancing the 4.61 percent of college graduates among the adult population of 1940 (Dunn, 1989). Increased access and achievement levels have been a result of several factors, including the willingness of colleges to implement remedial education programs. These programs survived their formative years to become an essential component of most college curricula, serving traditional and non-traditional students alike (Mayhew, 1990).

It is generally accepted that colleges will be required to maintain their remedial efforts for the foreseeable future. That expectation is witnessed in both professional literature and popular publications. Titles such as "The Literary Crisis and American Education" (McCabe & Skidmore, 1982), Crisis in the Classroom (Silberman, 1970), What Went Wrong with American Education and How to Make it Right (Witonski, 1973), "The Decline of American Education in the '60s and '70s" (Oldenquist, 1983), "Education: Help! Teacher Can't Teach" (Foote, 1980), and "College Faculty Says

Students Underprepared" (Kelly, 1989) adequately reflect a portion of educational reality and offer an explanation for the existence of remedial programming at the post-secondary level. These titles and others reflect a continuing concern for the erosion of quality in our public school system, succinctly addressed in A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), and the failures of the educational reform movements over the last 30 years.

A Nation at Risk, much like the launching of Sputnik decades earlier, triggered a wave of activity directed at improving the quality of public education. It is generally accepted, as measured by qualitative terms as opposed to egalitarian gains, the reform movements did not abate the erosion of quality in education (Mayhew, 1990). Particularly relevant to the discussion herein is the insignificant impact of the efforts of educational reforms to produce positive changes in the 80s, a decade holding what has been described as "perhaps the most intense period of educational reform ever seen in the United States" (Lieberman, 1988, p. 5). During the 80s, in an attempt to deal with the educational crisis depicted in A Nation at Risk, billions of additional dollars were pumped into public education. "Computers were bought, teachers' salaries hiked . . . counseling increased . . . the results scant" (Benedetto and Ordovensky, 1989, p. 2).

#### Underprepared Students and State Initiatives

The results of the last three decades of reform have helped produce an adult population with an "estimated 23 million . . . who cannot read beyond fourth grade . . . and another 45 million who cannot read beyond eighth . . . [with] some 400,000 new

individuals moving into the adult illiterate group each year" (AACJC, 1987, p. 6). At the same time, the public school system continues to yield fewer graduates prepared for college-level training. Representatives from both segments of the adult population combine to generate the vast majority of community college enrollments. Therefore, one should not be surprised that more than 50 percent of entering community college students lack the basic skills to do college-level academic work (Mayhew, 1990). It is for this growing segment of the population that remedial programs must be maintained in our two-year colleges.

The history of remedial education programs in community colleges and the impact of these programs are well documented. The purpose herein is to concentrate on a relatively new phenomena in that brief history. It is the role of state legislatures and/or state governing boards in the remediation process that holds immediate attention. That role has expanded in some states from being a provider of resources to being an actively involved participant in establishing admission procedures and graduation requirements. The extremes in the various roles assumed by state governmental units may be exemplified by Kansas and Tennessee. Kansas will fund remedial courses but does not require community colleges to offer them. Therefore, a couple of community colleges in Kansas have virtually no enrollment in remedial courses. Tennessee represents the other extreme, with states like Florida and Texas somewhere between the poles but both evidencing a proactive, if not intrusive, posture toward remediation.

Tennessee, through its Board of Regents in 1985, dramatically intervened on behalf of underprepared students. The decision to do so is noteworthy because of the

phenomenal growth of enrollment in remedial programs, the state's willingness to provide enhanced funding for remediation courses, and the requirement that remediation be completed before the student is allowed to enroll in any degree program. The state's 1985 educational mandate has withstood the national budget crisis which has caused other legislatures to question, if not to resent, the necessity of providing funding for remediation at the college level (Lieberman, 1988). Furthermore, the program has withstood internal and external criticism that the Tennessee Board of Regents has placed artificial barriers to student access to much-needed technical education degrees and other human development opportunities. The practice of using traditional academic achievement measures for limiting student access to technical curricula is addressed and challenged by Parnell (1985) in The Neglected Majority.

#### Implementing a State-Wide Program of Remediation

The Tennessee Legislature has placed its 12 community colleges and two technical institutes, along with six universities and 26 area vocational-technical schools (AVTS), under the direction of the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR).<sup>1</sup> The AVTS, enrolling 31,000 students in 1991-92, do not offer programs leading to a college degree. Therefore, unlike other Regents institutions, the AVTS were not required to adopt the 1985 admission criteria designed to regulate access to degree programs. However, the

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<sup>1</sup>The universities included under the Regents are Austin Peay State University, East Tennessee State University, Memphis State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, and Tennessee Technological University. The University of Tennessee has a separate governing board. The activities and funding of the two systems are coordinated by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

administrative regulation has had a significant impact on the initial course enrollment decisions of the over 100,000 FTE students attending TBR's two- and four-year institutions. Since 1985, each entering class has placed at least 50 percent of their first-time freshmen under 21 years old in one or more remedial classes. The mandatory placement for those over 20 was much higher for each class. During Fall semester 1991, 13,700 FTE of TBR's new freshmen enrolled were placed in college preparatory courses; 11,000 FTE or 81 percent of these students were enrolled at two-year colleges (TBR, 1992). Preliminary data for the 1992-93 academic year indicate that enrollment in remedial courses will increase at a higher rate than the estimated 3.5 percent growth of the TBR system. Past and projected enrollment trends demonstrate that Tennessee, through the Board of Regents, has made a major commitment to assisting students achieve the prerequisite skills necessary for a successful experience in higher education and other settings associated with the life-long-learning process. The direct costs for the remediation effort in 1991-92, in all TBR institutions, were 23.1 million (TBR, 1992).

The decision to commit significant resources to give underprepared students another opportunity to develop adequate learning skills and basic academic competencies was made rather recently. The decision was driven by years of data, such as the findings in A Nation at Risk; reports from college campuses much like the testimony in "College Faculty Says Students Underprepared;" and, lastly, a large segment of incoming students registered a belief that they were not prepared for college-level work. The students' candid evaluation of their levels of preparation was gathered in a 1983 TBR poll of entering freshmen who had taken the American College

Testing (ACT) examination as high school seniors. Roughly 37 percent expressed a need for additional preparation in mathematics and study skills, while 27 percent felt underprepared in reading and language skills. The results and conclusions of the study were published by the TBR in "A White Paper" (1984), the document which detailed a plan requiring all TBR universities and colleges to develop programs for underprepared students.

With the July 1984 release of "A White Paper" came the commitment to a state-wide remedial instructional program and guidelines for each institution to use in establishing a program compatible with respective missions. The guidelines issued definitions of the competencies required for success in college-level work, and the preferred objectives and structure of the remediation curriculum. The curriculum was designed to be two-tiered: the lower tier is called remedial while the upper tier is called developmental. Remedial instruction would lead to proficiency in the "Basic Skills Competencies" outlined by the Tennessee State Department of Education. In general, "basic skills" are academic equivalents to competencies targeted for mastery at the junior high school level. Developmental instruction, more closely associated with college-level work, would lead to proficiency at levels defined in the "Basic Academic Competencies" and the "Basic Academic Subjects" established by the Educational Equality Project of the College Board (College Board, 1983). Based upon the findings and recommendations delineated in "A White Paper," a new funding formula was constructed to provide resources for an inclusive remedial/developmental program. The new funding mechanism met the approval of the state legislature, giving the remediation program not

only a funding priority, but also legitimizing limited access to all degree programs within the TBR system. It is anticipated that 25 million dollars will be expended, just by the campuses, in 1992-93 to meet current demand.

Program costs are directed at maintaining an effective process to identify underprepared students and to assist them in overcoming academic deficiencies. The process, which has undergone minor revisions, was defined in 1984 in "A White Paper." The paper included a section which provided guidelines for student placement and identified the assessment instruments to be used by all degree-granting institutions. It was expected that campus programs would have accurate student assessment prior to program admission, clearly stated measurable entry/exit competencies for remedial/developmental courses, and policies and procedures for pre and post testing. The key to the process remains determining who is, and therefore who is not, eligible for unqualified admission. Students who scored at least a 19 on the Enhanced ACT composite have been unconditionally admitted, while students with less than a 19 and all entering students over 20 years of age have been required to participate in further testing. The second round of testing is the responsibility of the campuses and measures proficiency in mathematics, English, and reading. Depending on the second test score, the student is either placed in remedial/developmental or "tests out" and becomes eligible for college-level instruction. If the students who "tested out," or any other student, are found to be underprepared in their college classes, they are referred to remedial programming for additional testing and/or counseling.

During the last five years, 92.5 thousand FTE students have been identified and assisted by the process outlined in "A White Paper." The process was developed by TBR while major reforms were being proposed for the state's public school system. Tennessee's 80's reform movement included a component called the Better Schools Program (BSP), which established a commission to radically improve instruction in K-12. Based on the objectives of BSP, the Tennessee Board of Regents anticipated that the size and number of remedial/developmental programs would gradually decrease after the first five years. The assumption was based upon the premise that the BSP would ultimately better prepare students for post-secondary education. Stricter admission requirements at TBR institutions were implemented to support the agenda of the BSP. Longitudinal data, however, show that since Fall 1985, when the first incoming class was assessed and placed according to test scores, enrollment in remedial/developmental programs has increased, particularly at two-year institutions, and the trend is expected to continue into the next century.

#### Program Budget and Enrollment

In most respects, post-secondary education in Tennessee mirrors the fiscal environment plaguing our nation's college campuses. The two prominent factors for the last few years have been static or reduced budget authority and higher operating costs (inflation and enrollment increases). TBR institutions have suffered two consecutive years of reduced funding, with no relief projected, while enrollment jumped 6.9 percent in 1991 and 3.5 percent in 1992. Enrollment patterns within the state also reflect

national trends. Some examples of commonality include the growing number of part-time students and older students (over 25 years old), slight increases in first-time, full-time students, and two-year colleges growing faster than senior institutions. Unlike national trends, Tennessee reports increases in African American enrollment and students mandatorily placed in remedial education programs (Cole, 1992).

Summative data presented above give an indication of the impact of TBR's mandatory remediation program and the \$110 million dollar price tag for the six-year effort from Fall 1986 to Fall 1992 is also telling. The 1992-93 academic year should raise the cost by another 25 million dollars. During the 1986-87 academic year, 14,875 FTE students participated in preparatory instruction; the last full year (1991-92), 23,868 FTE were registered in remedial/developmental course work, a 62 percent increase in the five-year period. The same five-year period witnessed a 83 percent growth in remediation on the campuses of two-year institutions (TBR, Spring 1992).

Though both the two- and four-year institutions have large populations involved in college preparatory instruction, the figures for the two-year colleges are stunning. Of the first-time, degree-seeking students who registered during Fall 1986, 73 percent were placed in one or more remedial/developmental courses. That number expanded to 85 percent in Fall 1991 and will likely reach 87 percent in 1992-93 given program history and enrollment projections. The program's history shows the impact of mandatory remediation was not equal among groups. Nearly all (95 percent) new students over 21 years were placed in at least one remedial course in 1991, up from 74 percent in 1986. Nineteen and 20 year olds placed 84 percent of their group in remediation in 1991, up

from 65 percent in 1986. The 18 and younger provided a lower portion of their group (59 percent) in 1991, but much higher than the 46 percent in 1986. African Americans were placed in remediation at a much higher rate than non-African Americans. The percent of African Americans placed ranged from 70 percent in 1988 to 85 percent in 1991. Non-African American placement, however, has never reached 70 percent (TBR, 1992). Longitudinal data for gender are not published by TBR. One two-year college reported that women are potentially represented in remediation, which may or may not be indicative of the system.

The distribution of students among the preparatory courses has also shown variance, especially between mathematics and language skills. Required placement in reading courses in community colleges remains high (48 percent) but lower than the 62 percent registered in 1986. Enrollment in remedial English classes, not surprisingly, was not too dissimilar from enrollment in reading. A low was reached in 1988 at 46 percent, when reading held 50 percent of new students. But, unlike enrollment trends in reading, required placement in remedial English has gone up the last two years, reaching an all time high of 55 percent. Required placement for new students in mathematics has never been that low and is currently at a new high of 82 percent. Another large group of entering freshmen (over 50 percent) is placed in study skills. The total effort to test and place students has resulted in 85 percent of all new students entering two-year institutions in pursuit of a degree being required to upgrade one or more areas of academic deficiency (TBR, 1992).

### A Campus Response

Nashville State Technical Institute (NSTI) is one of 14 two-year colleges governed by TBR and one of Tennessee's two post-secondary institutions primarily concerned with the delivery of technical education. NSTI offers only the associate of applied science degree. Having the authority to award the degree brought the organization under the dictates of "A White Paper." Accordingly, NSTI responded by adjusting admissions requirements and procedures in preparation for Fall 1985. The organization proceeded to conform with guidelines on "the basis of [their] appropriateness to [the institute's] mission and the nature and needs of . . . curriculum" ("A White Paper," 1984, p.7) Using competencies published in Academic Preparation for College (College Board, 1983), the Developmental Education Committee at Nashville Tech created outcome proficiencies for remedial and developmental courses in math, English, reading, and study skills. These same competencies were named in the Tennessee Comprehensive Educational Reform Act passed in 1984.

In Fall 1984, 181 FTE students voluntarily placed themselves in the institute's remediation program after testing. The 181 FTE were a 5.5 percent increase over those enrolled in 1980, and a 26.5 percent increase in the 136 FTE enrolled in 1975. For the nine-year period (1975-84), enrollment growth in the remedial program lagged behind the institute's overall growth of 35 percent. Institutional growth, actually negative, between Fall terms 1984 and 1985 was -4.7 percent. However, FTE growth for the same period in the remedial education program increased 125 percent as a result of the new testing and placement procedures enforced for the first time in Fall 1985. Since

Fall 1984, NSTI has not experienced any overall growth in FTE while enrollment in remedial/developmental courses has increased 292 percent between Fall 1984 and Fall 1992. The abrupt and major movement of students from technical education programs to remedial education has created structural problems within the institute. The new enrollment patterns were compounded by the funding formula which was also changed to accommodate the objectives of "A White Paper." The funding formula restricts monies earned through the remediation program to expenses related to that program. Funds not reinvested in the program cannot be transferred to assist other curricula. At the close of fiscal year 1992, over \$165,000 of the "fenced" monies were unencumbered while nearly \$700,000 were "cut" from other functional areas to compensate for reduced budget authority.

Conclusion:

Tennessee, through the Board of Regents, has made a major commitment to underprepared students. It is unlikely that the effort will be sustained given the realities of state budget and enrollment patterns which are troubling educational and political leaders. The leadership structure adopted the programs, anticipating the reforms of the 80's would make the program unnecessary within a decade, except for a relatively small and diminishing segment of the adult population. Leaders are now confronted with a growing program which demands a healthy portion of available resources. Even if enrollment in remedial/developmental courses stabilized or grew at the same rate as the TBR system, the program would still serve a significant number of students and require

a proportional share of resources. This prospect must be considered in terms of our national wealth and the stability of that wealth given the growing competitive nature of the global economy and national/state priorities.

Yet, the same factors, plus the seemingly inordinate number of students requiring preparatory work, should prevent the program from being dismantled. Competitiveness in a global economy, and thus our national wealth, is dependent upon an educated work force and workers armed with basic learning skills.

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